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ABSTRACT

This lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand that both individual families and whole cultures learn about their pasts by collecting and analyzing stories and artifacts; and that not all archeological finds readily reveal their history to archeologists. The main activity in the lesson involves students in making an oral presentation of stories that have been passed down through the generations in their families. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)

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# TITLE OF LESSON PLAN: Archeology and Storytelling

**LENGTH OF LESSON:** Two class periods

**GRADE LEVEL:** 6-8

**SUBJECT AREA:** Literature

**CREDIT:**
Sandy and Jay Lamb, teachers, Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, Alexandria, Virginia.

**OBJECTIVES:**
Students will understand the following:

1. Both individual families and whole cultures learn about their pasts by collecting and analyzing stories and artifacts.

2. Not all archaeological finds readily reveal their history to archeologists.

**MATERIALS:**
You may want to ask students to bring family heirlooms to class (see Procedures).

World map for reference as students tell family stories

**PROCEDURE:**

1. This lesson makes the point that among the ways people learn history are stories passed on by word of mouth, sometimes referred to as folklore, which later on may be written down. Begin a discussion by asking students why people tell stories—both the stories they read from books and the stories they make up or pass on without books. Responses you want to get include "to remember things that happened" and "to explain why or how things happened."

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2. Ask students to paraphrase folklore that you have already covered in class, or provide students some examples of folklore—say, a story about Paul Bunyan; the story about George Washington and the cherry tree; the legend of Johnny Appleseed. Make the point that some stories that began orally are clearly fictitious, and some reflect a real event or phenomenon.

3. Ask for student volunteers to prepare an oral presentation, with their parents' or guardians' assistance, of stories that have been passed down through the generations in their families. You might begin with an example of your own. To prod students' minds, list the types of events that often are memorialized as family stories:

- How the family came to live in the United States

- How the family survived a war or a natural disaster

- How two ancestors met and fell in love

- How a long-ago relative did something amazing

4. Move on to talk about heirlooms that families hold on to, sharing with the class an heirloom from your family—a piece of fabric, a pair of candlesticks, or something else. Ask students to bring in and talk about heirlooms from their families. What do the heirlooms teach us or remind us about ways of life in generations past?

5. Go on to talk about the kinds of research that archaeologists do: They examine old structures and piece together bones and artifacts and also piece together fragments of oral stories to try to understand what happened in a place a long time ago. As an example, mention to students that researchers recently heard an oral story about long-ago visitors to a part of North America and found an extremely old shelter not far from where the storyteller lived. The researchers took both findings—the story and the shelter—as further evidence that the Vikings traveled from Scandinavia to North America a thousand years ago. Other sites where archeologists have uncovered both stories and artifacts include Nan Madol in the Pacific and Marble Island in the Arctic (both discussed in the video *Islands of Mystery*).

**ADAPTATIONS:**

Assign each student the responsibility for contributing a written story to a class anthology of oral literature. The story should involve a student's family directly or should touch on an important theme, event, or explanation in a student's cultural group.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Discuss the value of oral history and local legends to archeological research. Why, in both investigations, did researchers put heavy emphasis on them? How reliable do you think they are?

2. Why did the archaeologist and the historian really crawl ashore on Marble Island? Did they believe the curse? Did they not want to offend any watching Inuits? What would you have done?

3. Discuss various reasons why the Pohnpei Islanders would have put so much effort, over such a length of time, to build Nan Madol. What would have motivated them to begin such a project?

4. Which theory explaining the disappearance of Captain Knight's crew makes the most sense to you? What evidence supports your theory? What other alternatives can you think of?

5. What reasons might the Inuit have had for making Marble Island a cemetery island? What does this say about their beliefs and culture?

6. Discuss possible scenarios of what might really have taken place when legend says a hero arrived at Nan Madol to overthrow the tyrants. What would this new group have found? How would they have reacted? Why might this "coup" be successful?

**EVALUATION:**

Remind students before they speak of the importance of planning what they are going to say, considering how they are going to say it, and thinking about how to get and hold the audience's attention. After students speak, let each presenter know whether he or she demonstrated good public speaking in the oral presentation or whether he or she showed the need for more practice and focus.

**EXTENSION:**

**Dig In!**
Show students the work of archaeologists firsthand by taking them to a nearby archaeological dig. Many local parks maintain staff archaeologists or historians who can show students a local dig or speak to the class about past digs. Alternatively, a nearby university may have faculty archaeologists who can speak about modern archaeological tools such as satellite positioning and carbon dating.

**Legends**
Invite a professional storyteller to visit the class and share tales that have come to be associated with your region of the country. Encourage the students to ask the storyteller about what the tales might have meant to the people who originated them.

**SUGGESTED READINGS:**

**The Case of the Mummified Pigs, and Other Mysteries in Nature**
Susan E. Quinlan, Boyds Mills Press, 1995
The Mystery of St. Matthew Island and The Case of the Twin Islands are two mysteries, among many others, covered in this account of natural phenomena that continue to mystify scientists and archaeologists.

**The Water Brought Us: The Story of the Gullah-Speaking People**
Muriel Miller Branch, Cobblehill Books, 1995
One of the most unusual island cultures that continues to exist is that of the Gullahs, the people who inhabit the Sea Islands off of the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. Read about the emergence and continuation of the Gullahs' unique creole language, which can be traced back to the slave culture of the West Indies.

**WEB LINKS:**

**Mysterious Nan Madol**
Visit the online Nan Madol photographic travel log.
http://pats.edu/nanmadol.htm

**Easter Island Home Page**
Explore possibilities from cannibalism to extraterrestrial influence in the erection of the many massive heads peering out across the face of Easter Island.
http://www.netaxs.com/~trance/rapanui.html

**Volcano World**
A clickable map shows where the current hot spots are on earth, and up-to-the-minute information on the formation of new islands throughout the world.
http://volcano.und.nodak.edu/

**Mysterious Places**
Explore the mysteries of sacred sites, natural phenomena and ancient civilizations such as Easter Island, the Kevas of the Anasazi, the lost city of Atlantis, and the Bermuda Triangle.
http://www.mysteriousplaces.com/

**Welcome to ...WEIRD MYSTERIES**
If you like to explore mysterious natural phenomena that defy explanation, like crop circles and spontaneous combustion, check out "Weird Mysteries."
http://www.europa.com/%7Eedge/weird.html

**VOCABULARY:**

**myth**
A traditional, typically ancient story dealing with supernatural beings, ancestors, or heroes that serves as a fundamental type in the world view of a people.
**Context:**
So now the archaeologists have a new insight into an important myth which may explain why the ancients built their city where they did.

**artifacts**
An object produced or shaped by human craft, especially a tool, a weapon, or an ornament of archaeological or historical interest.
**Context:**
Satellite position technology helps fix the exact location of stone walls and artifacts.

**ingenuity**
Inventive skill or imagination; cleverness.
**Context:**
Moving them must have required massive rafts and immense ingenuity.

**coercion**
The act of forcing one to think or behave in a certain way by use of pressure, threats, or intimidation.
**Context:**
The archaeologists believe the rulers challenged the islanders' competitive spirit using a mixture of persuasion and coercion.

**tyrants**
Absolute rulers who govern without restriction, and exercise power in a harsh, cruel manner.
**Context:**
In a fierce battle, they overthrew the tyrants.

**scurvy**
A disease caused by deficiency of vitamin C, characterized by spongy and bleeding gums, bleeding under the skin, and extreme weakness.
**Context:**
In the 1800s, crews of American whaling ships spent the winters here; many died of scurvy.

**interlopers**
Ones who interfere in the affairs of others, often for selfish reasons.
**Context:**
Perhaps they attacked and killed the interlopers in a bloody battle.

**ACADEMIC STANDARDS:**

**Grade Level:** 6-8

**Subject Area:** world history

**Standard:** Understands the biological and cultural processes that shaped the earliest human communities.

**Benchmarks:**
Understands scientific methods used to determine the dates and evolution of different human communities (e.g., different types of evidence dating techniques; different methods employed by archaeologists, geologists, and anthropologists to study hominid evolution; how human remains can be used can be used to construct possible chronological sequences of human evolution).

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Subject Area:** world history

**Standard:** Understands the biological and cultural processes that shaped the earliest human communities.

**Benchmarks:**
Understands the methods by which early human communities are studied and what these studies reveal (e.g., the way in which newly discovered sites and investigative techniques used to examine them affect the study and understanding of human evolution, how common refuse can be studied to make inferences about earlier communities).

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Subject Area:** world history

**Standard:** Understands the biological and cultural processes that shaped the earliest human communities.

**Benchmarks:**
Understands how different kinds of evidence are used to determine the cultural characteristics of early human communities (e.g., how non-verbal evidence such as burials, carvings, and paintings can indicate the presence of religion; how archaeological

evidence demonstrates the influences of climate, geographic location, and economic specialization on everyday life).

**Grade Level:** 6-8

**Subject Area:** geography

**Standard:** Understands the physical and human characteristics of place.

**Benchmarks:**
Knows the causes and effects of changes in a place over time (e.g., physical changes such as forest cover, water distribution, temperature fluctuations; human changes such as urban growth, the clearing of forests, development of transportation systems).

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Subject Area:** geography

**Standard:** Understands the physical and human characteristics of place.

**Benchmarks:**
Knows how social, cultural and economic processes shape the features of places (e.g., resource use, belief systems, modes of transportation and communication, major technological changes such as the agricultural and industrial revolutions, population growth and urbanization).

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**Video Information and Comprehension Questions**

**Video Description**
Visit the spectacular ancient ruins of Nan Matol, a group of remote islands in the Pacific. And join scientists searching for clues about the 18th-century disappearance of two English ships near the bleak Marble Island in the Canadian arctic.

View Lesson Plan

Download Comprehension Questions & Answers

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

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## TITLE OF VIDEO:
Islands of Mystery

**VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:**

**1. How did Nan Madol ("the place between the spaces") get its name?**

**2. Why is Nan Madol called one of the ancient wonders of the world?**

**3. How were scientists able to accurately map Nan Madol?**

**4. What process do scientists speculate was used to quarry stone columns from the bedrock to build Nan Madol?**

**5. What problems will archaeologists have in the future when trying to investigate Nan Madol?**

**6. According to Inuit legend, how was Marble Island formed?**

**7. Why do the archaeologist and historian crawl ashore on Marble Island?**

**8. How were the scientists able to determine the ethnic origin of the pieces of bone they found?**

**9. What is the most recent theory about the fate of Captain Knight's crew?**

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# Islands of Mystery

**VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:**

**1. How did Nan Madol ("the place between the spaces") get its name?**
Nan Madol got its name because of the canals linking scores of manmade islands together, leading some to refer to it as the "Venice of the Pacific."

**2. Why is Nan Madol called one of the ancient wonders of the world?**
Nan Madol is called one of the wonders of the ancient world because of the difficulty of its construction and the huge quantity of materials needed in building the massive sea wall around the city.

**3. How were scientists able to accurately map Nan Madol?**
Scientists were able to use modern high-tech surveying techniques, such as satellite positioning technology, to fix the exact location of the stone walls and artifacts to create an accurate picture of Nan Madol.

**4. What process do scientists speculate was used to quarry stone columns from the bedrock to build Nan Madol?**
Scientists speculate that fires were built against the rock columns to heat the rock face, then cold water was poured over them to create deep cracks so that the column would split and levers could be used to separate it from the bedrock.

**5. What problems will archaeologists have in the future when trying to investigate Nan Madol?**
There will be difficulty investigating Nan Madol in the future because the island's oral historians, who have provided archaeologists with many clues, are dying out and the younger generation of islanders have not developed this oral tradition.

**6. According to Inuit legend, how was Marble Island formed?**
According to Inuit legend, Marble Island was transformed from an iceberg by the gods as they answered the plea of an old woman on the iceberg to let her die on land.

**7. Why do the archaeologist and historian crawl ashore on Marble Island?**
The archaeologist and historian crawl ashore on Marble Island, in the manner described in Inuit tradition, out of respect to the old woman of the island and to the Inuit legend that says that those who do not crawl ashore will die within a year and a day.

**8. How were the scientists able to determine the ethnic origin of the pieces of bone they found?**
Scientists were able to determine the origin of the bone fragments through modern analysis which showed that the fragments had the same lead levels as 18th-century Englishmen.

**9. What is the most recent theory about the fate of Captain Knight's crew?**
The most recent theory about the missing crew is based on a newly reported Inuit folk tale that suggests a French warship may have landed on Marble Island and captured the explorers.

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